

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

February 15, 2013

DPH Budget

To: Senator Toni Harp and Representative Toni Walker and all members of the Appropriations Committee

My name is Barbara Sloan. I live in Wallingford, CT and am the secretary of NAMI-CT (the National Association on Mental Illness, Connecticut). I am also a former dual-diagnosis treatment program director and a mental health and addictions counselor. I also previously directed a multicounty-based diversion and intervention program for troubled youth in another state.

I'm sorry that I am unable to testify in person as I am out of state helping my elderly father.

I am very concerned about the proposal to eliminate the funding to expand School Based Health Centers (SBHCs). Funding for twenty-two new or expanded SBHCs was appropriated in Fiscal Year 2013. Eliminating this funding is detrimental to the welfare of our school children.

I'd like to share with you a story that a student in a large East Coast city told me about two years ago. This seventeen-year-old young man lived in the inner city. I met him because he had a summer job doing art work for a youth intervention program there.

He agreed to allow me to interview him and also showed me drawings he had done in his spare time. He was a gifted artist but all his pictures seemed to tell dark stories. One showed a boy sitting on the edge of a highway overpass with tears dropping from his eyes.

When I asked about this picture, the artist explained that it was his friend, who had jumped from the overpass and killed himself a few months before. He went on to explain that both his friend and he had received mental health services for depression from their school-based health center, but that budget cuts forced the center to stop their treatment.

Being poor in the inner city, they had no other resources to seek counseling. His friend's suicide was the result, as he saw things. He was worried about his own mental health, since he no longer had anyone to talk with.

This is what can happen to children when services are not available.

Even the loss of one child's life is too high a price to pay for the sake of even the most necessary budget cuts.

Schools are best positioned to catch both mental and physical health issues early, when they are most treatable and will do the least long-term damage to a child's life. Children who may not talk with their parents are often willing to speak to a school-based therapist.

Children who receive help early are less likely to develop long-term problems that will cost Connecticut even more money if they are too sick to work, on welfare and/or other state assistance.

I know that budget cuts are necessary, but the savings that may result from cuts to school-based health centers are far outweighed by the savings of having them. Our children's lives may truly depend on having these school-based resources available to them.

I implore you not to cut funding for school-based health centers.

If this story has moved you, please let me know so that I can tell this wonderful young man that his story made a difference, that he made a difference just by speaking up.

Thank you for your attention to my testimony.

Barbara Sloan, M.Ed., Wallingford

Please contact NAMI-CT #860-882-0236 if you wish any further information from me. As long as I am out of state this is the best way to reach me.